

**WHAT IS CLAIMED:**

1. A disposable scalpel comprising:
  - a handle;
  - a surgical blade attached to one end of the handle;
  - a sheath covering at least a portion of the handle, movable between two positions:
    - an open position wherein the blade is at least partly uncovered; and
    - a closed position wherein the blade is substantially covered;
  - a flexible locking strip attached to the handle for engaging the sheath in the open and closed positions;
  - a first button attached to the sheath for releasing the flexible locking strip and allowing the sheath to be moved between the open and the closed position; and
  - a second button attached to the sheath for permanently locking the sheath in the closed position.
2. The scalpel of claim 1 wherein the flexible locking strip sits in a first opening when the sheath is in the open position, said first opening being in the sheath.
3. The scalpel of claim 1 wherein the flexible locking strip sits in a second opening when the sheath is in the closed position, said second opening being in the sheath.
4. The scalpel of claim 3, wherein the second button sits in the second opening when the sheath is in the closed position.
5. The scalpel of claim 4, wherein the second button engages a portion of the flexible locking strip on one side when the sheath is in the closed position.
6. A disposable scalpel having a sheath, the sheath having three modes of operation:

a protective mode where the sheath covers the blade, said sheath being made substantially immobile by means of a substantially flexible strip; and

an open mode where a blade connected to a handle of the scalpel can be used when the sheath is in a retracted position, and

a permanently locked mode where the sheath covers the blade in permanently locked position, said locked position being achieved by depressing a locking button.

7. The scalpel of claim 6 wherein the substantially flexible strip sits in a first opening when the sheath is in the open mode, said first opening being in the sheath.

8. The scalpel of claim 6 wherein the substantially flexible strip sits in a second opening when the sheath is in the protective mode, said second opening being in the sheath.

9. The scalpel of claim 8, wherein the locking button sits in the second opening when the sheath is in the permanently locked mode.

10. The scalpel of claim 9, wherein the locking button engages a portion of the substantially flexible strip when the sheath is in the permanently locked mode.

11. The scalpel of claim 6 wherein the handle comprises at least one rail along a first portion of the handle and the sheath comprises at least one groove along the inside of the sheath, the rail of the handle fitting into the groove of the sheath and facilitating the movement of the sheath.

12. The scalpel of claim 6 wherein the outside of the sheath has raised angular ridges.

13. The scalpel of claim 6 wherein the flexible locking strip is a cantilever.

14. The scalpel of claim 8 further including a release button for releasing the substantially flexible strip from the second opening so as to displace the sheath from the protective mode.

15. The scalpel of claim 7 further including a release button for releasing the substantially flexible strip from the first opening so as to displace the sheath from the open mode.

16. A disposable scalpel comprising:  
a handle;  
a surgical blade attached to one end of the handle;  
a sheath covering at least a portion of the handle, movable between two positions:  
an open position wherein the blade is at least partly uncovered; and  
a closed position wherein the blade is substantially covered; and  
a first button attached to the sheath for permanently locking the sheath in the closed position.

17. The scalpel of claim 16 further including a flexible locking strip attached to the handle for engaging the sheath in the open and closed positions;

18. The scalpel of claim 17 further including a second button attached to the sheath for releasing the flexible locking strip and allowing the sheath to be moved between the open and the closed position.

19. The scalpel of claim 17 wherein the flexible locking strip sits in a first opening when the sheath is in the open position, said first opening being in the sheath.

20. The scalpel of claim 17 wherein the flexible locking strip sits in a second opening when the sheath is in the closed position, said second opening being in the sheath.

21. The scalpel of claim 20, wherein the first button sits in the second opening when the sheath is in the closed position.

22. The scalpel of claim 21, wherein the first button engages a portion of the flexible locking strip when the sheath is in the closed position.